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"THE THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG": COMMUNICATIONS  
ANALYSIS OF A PROPAGANDA MOVEMENT

John H Weakland

Mental Research Institute  
Palo Alto, California

January 1967

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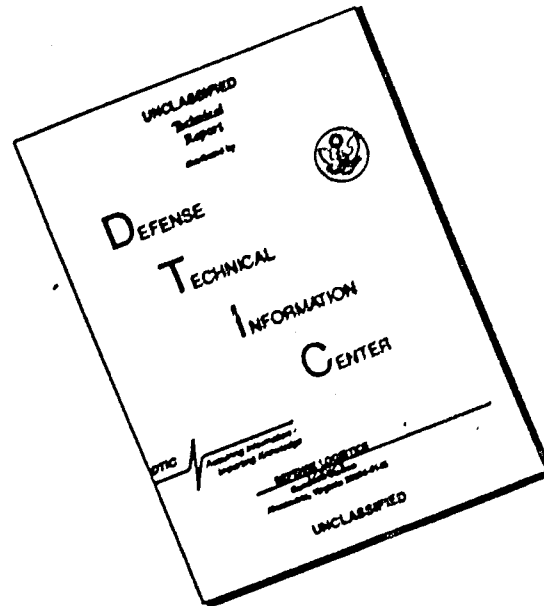
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## SUMMARY

This report aims to clarify the "Thought of Mao Tse-tung" propaganda movement specifically, and in relation to this case study to clarify and contrast misleading versus productive approaches to political communications more generally. In both instance, this work is pitched at a broad level, since details are more apt to be confusing than enlightening unless set in an appropriate overall framework. For similar reasons, this is not a work of "content analysis" as such, but an examination of content and contexts in interrelation.

Mao's writings and speeches have of course been very important in Chinese Communism since the 1930's, at first mainly as strategic guides to political and military problems, "combining the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution". By the late 1950's and especially the early 1960's, however, although Mao himself was saying much less, a great movement to promote study of his works and their application to all sorts of practical - and particularly technical - problems was on. In the last two years the promotion of Mao's thought, and of Mao himself, has become yet more intensive and extensive, while simultaneously more and more abstract, stereotyped and repetitive.

From its very scope, this propaganda movement must be important to China's Communist leaders, and therefore to us. Our usual reaction, however, is to dismiss it as absurd and irrational without real examination, while other Chinese Communist statements are taken at "face value."

This report proposes that this set of alternatives is necessarily misleading, as alien to the general nature of communication and its interpretation, and states a set of principles of approach for more adequate analysis of political messages. These principles involve 1) Viewing communicative data explicitly as messages of a sender, 2) maintenance of a positive viewpoint which seeks sense and order, 3) holistic viewing, 4) concentration on the basic original data, and 5) considering messages in relation to all significant contexts.

The general nature and significance of the "Thought of Mao" movement is analyzed, in line with these principles, by dividing it into three stages and for each examining jointly Mao's own output and his position, the statements about these put forth by the Chinese Communists, and the prevailing Chinese political context, internally and externally. The

long first phase occurred in the context of struggling for national power and reconstruction while looking up to the Soviet Union; Mao was his own spokesman about strategic problems of the revolution, in terms rather immediately comprehensible because the means-ends relationships are familiar, despite our disagreement with Mao's particular goals. The second phase, occurring in the political context of Chinese disputes with the Soviet Union and associated necessary political and economic self-reliance, initially appears most confusing, since the movement focuses on technical problems - major interest of ourselves - but Mao's thought appears irrelevant as itself very non-technical. This troublesome contradiction is largely resolvable by noting that the relevance actually claimed by the Chinese is psychological - a matter of morale - and that this is significant for technical innovation and development even in the West, and more so in the Chinese cultural context. During the third phase there have been major factional struggles in Communist China, yet rivalry with the Soviet Union world Communist leadership. In this context the claims of the movement for Mao's greatness and the power of his thought, which "Lights the Whole World" as a touchstone for political rightness and success, have been so extreme yet abstract and content-less, that they appear fantastic rather than contradictory and puzzling. Yet even these claims are largely understandable if viewed in a religious light, which is justified by their form and by the Chinese cultural context. Chinese social ideology traditionally has been rather religious in tone and function, with the Chinese ruler an object of quasi-religious veneration, and potentially a source of strength through national identification.

The overall movement also exhibits a discernable pattern of development. As Mao has grown in power and position - but correspondingly in isolation - the main emphasis on "The Thought of Mao" has changed from pragmatic to psychological to ideological-religious. This developmental pattern has direct historical parallels in previous successful Chinese rebellions, and also fundamental if less immediate parallels in the succession of roles within the traditional Chinese family.

These parallels also aid in estimating present realities and future prospects for Mao and Chinese Communism. In association with the unprecedented intensity of current propaganda, as against its more traditional content, they suggest that Mao, though constantly labeled as the

"great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander and great helmsman", probably functions considerably as the "great figurehead". Yet we should not unduly anticipate major changes on this account. Much of this study confirms the basic Chineseness of even Chinese Communism, including a traditional system of political roles. Figureheads also can be of great importance in this system, and even if Mao falls or dies, the next leader, as a Chinese moving into the same position, should expectably act more the same than different.

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**"THE THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG":  
COMMUNICATIONAL ANALYSIS OF A PROPAGANDA MOVEMENT**

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**I - INTRODUCTION**

The specific and immediate purpose of this report is to make Chinese Communist emphases on the power and value of "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung" more understandable, by viewing their pronouncements on this major political topic freshly in the light of current knowledge about communication. Its broader and proximate purpose is to outline clearly the nature of this approach, as one which is useful generally for better understanding of political and propaganda messages. These two analytically distinguished aims are closely linked in actual practice: As a case study, this examination of "The Thought of Mao" movement illustrates and clarifies the approach, yet an appropriate general approach is a prerequisite for making an adequate case study. The basis of such an approach, however, might only be implicit. To make it as evident as possible, we will here present both an explicit statement of basic principles concerning the nature of communication and its study, and a contrasting examination of the nature of some common but fundamentally misleading ways of viewing Chinese Communist statements about "The Thought of Mao."

The Nature and Level of This Study

Both the chosen analytical stance of this study and the level of analysis at which it is pitched are quite unusual in this field. It is therefore desirable, in order to minimize inappropriate expectations and possible misunderstandings, to describe and explain both generally at once, while recognizing that they can only become fully clear through concrete exemplification as the report progresses.

Although this study certainly is concerned with examining the content of messages about the nature and promotion of "The Thought of Mao", this is not a work of "content analysis" in the usual sense, because it is not mainly concerned with particular units of content (whether words, phrases, or even themes) taken separately or related only minimally and formally, as by tabulations of frequency of occurrence or by simple correlations among these. Rather, this work is mainly concerned with discerning and investigating the significance of interrelations among main elements of



content (which may include the form or style of messages as well as words and phrases) and especially between content and context.\*

It is perhaps even more important to recognize that both the empirical inquiry concerning the nature and significance of the "Thought of Mao" movement and the methodological analysis concerning such inquiries are deliberately pitched at a general level. That is, we are here concerned primarily with main patterns and their broad significance rather than with details of the content and function of the propaganda messages on the one hand, or detailed prescription of analytic procedures on the other, despite recognition that such levels of work might appear disappointing in the first instance and methodologically suspect in the second.

In complex situations of practical political importance there always is pressure on investigators to produce detailed "answers" that appear simple and immediately usable - that seem somehow to definitely settle specific questions, or to get rid of them. This demand from practical quarters is paralleled and reinforced by the similar demand from scientific quarters - in line with one currently prominent and powerful methodological orientation - that investigators must stress precision at the level of detail, both in adherence to traditional recipes for research and in statement of findings. These demands, however, may need to be resisted rather than acceded to, as they are too absolute. Circumstances do alter cases, even in scientific research, and such standards neglect, again, the importance of contextual factors. The most important contextual factors in research are the existing states of theoretical and empirical knowledge in an area of investigation. In the present instance, there is considerable information available on the "Thought of Mao" movement, but it is far from complete and little serious work has been done on it. Similarly, although

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\* The approach taken here has important similarities to that described by Schefflen for the study of communication in psychiatric situations under the label of "context analysis" (Schefflen, Albert E., Stream and Structure of Communicational Behavior: Context Analysis of a Psychotherapy Session. Philadelphia, Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, Behavioral Studies Monograph No. 1, 1965.) Yet even "context analysis" seems an inadequate term, as obscuring the central point that the content and contexts of messages must be studied equally and jointly.

recent work on the nature of communication and its pragmatic functioning in various kinds of social interaction systems is relevant as a foundation,\* as yet there has been little application of such knowledge to the analysis of political communications.

In such a new and little-explored situation it is particularly appropriate to concentrate on formulating broad concepts and on analytic approach which will fit the main outlines of the subject of investigation; utilization of these will lead toward certain broad yet fundamental findings, which in turn provide a sound foundation for further and more refined work if necessary.

In contrast, details (whether of facts, methods, or whatever), no matter how clear and definite they appear by themselves, can be interpreted and evaluated adequately only in relation to their more general context.\*\* This guiding principle for science also is an ordinary one in practical thought and action. It is largely a matter of common sense and common experience; yet it is often neglected. When undue emphasis is put on precision in details without adequate concern for the broad picture, especially in a uncharted area, errors are probable at three levels. First, the detailed findings themselves are likely to be erroneous or inadequate. Second, and more serious, apparent rigor of method or simplicity of statement are apt to make such findings appear more reliable or more complete than they are in fact; this leads to overly extensive reliance on them, and neglect of needs for checking or further study. Finally, if further study is nevertheless carried on, the same factors still tend to prevent any examination

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\* For a general exposition of this communicational viewpoint, see Matzlawick, H., Neavin, J.H., and Jackson, D.D., Pragmatics of Human Communication. (New York, Norton, 1967)

\*\* Thus here again, as in earlier statements about the relations between message content and context, and about the need to consider specific cases and analytic principles together, we are concerned with relationships between the more specific and the more general. This basic concern, in fact, is a crucial orientation for the entire study.

of the basic premises of study and their appropriateness, so that additional work is apt to result mainly in further multiplication and concealment of similar error.

## II - "THE THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG" - A SURVEY OF EMPHASES AND DEVELOPMENTS

Even the most cursory look at the current Chinese scene is sufficient to note the enormous official emphasis on the "Thought of Mao Tse-tung". Our own press and television news services transmit to Western audiences accounts of how hordes of youthful Red Guards wave their little red books of "quotations from Chairman Mao" as the guidebook of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, or unite in singing "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman", and report how Mao's thought is presented as the essential basis for the solution of any and all problems in China. Chinese Communist sources themselves present, if anything, a still more extreme picture. Such emphasis alone is ample to show that "The Thought of Mao" movement is politically of first-rank importance in Communist China, and correspondingly important for outsiders to understand - even if the Maoist faction, as the most extreme possibility, should fail in the current Chinese power struggle.

It must be emphasized that the central focus of interest here is not on the nature of Mao's thinking as such, although this of course is relevant, but on "The Thought of Mao" movement. The basic data for the study are thus not just Mao's own writings and speeches, but Chinese Communist statements about these. This focus is all the more important to keep clear because the extent and nature of the claims made for Mao's thought have changed significantly over time, especially in recent years - although Mao has made few major direct statements since "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" ten years ago; for the most part the movement today is based on citation and comment on works of Mao dating from twenty or thirty years ago.

The historical development of this movement in the Chinese political scene - including emphasis, both in extent and intensity, the aspects of the "Thought of Mao" referred to, and the kind of claims made in its

name - must therefore now be reviewed as a basis for subsequent analysis, although we are here mainly concerned with understanding the recent past, the present, and their implications for the future. This account will be relatively brief. The vast amount of repetition involved in this movement, though it should be noted as a significant characteristic, need not be duplicated here. The chief immediate aim is to present main lines clearly and simply, with more details to be given later.

The writings and speeches of Mao of course have necessarily been of great intrinsic importance for the Chinese Communists at least since the mid-1930's when he assumed a leading role in the Party, and for the entire nation since 1949, when the Communists gained control of the country under his leadership. This was the more true because while Mao was closely connected with the military struggles of the revolution, this was largely at the level of broad strategic planning. As Cohen states, "Although other Chinese leaders have been more competent on purely military matters, Mao has not been surpassed as the systematizer of the political and military doctrine of protracted guerrilla conflict by any other leader of his time."\* That is, in terms of the traditional but still relevant Chinese classification of leaders as men of action, usually military heroes, or men of thought, essentially scholars, Mao clearly falls in the "thinker" class as a theoretician, strategist, poet - and as a propagandist.

One source dates the first specific bringing of "Mao Tse-tung's Thought" to the fore as February 1942, when Mao launched a large-scale rectification campaign, followed in 1945 by the use of the term in the new constitution adopted by the seventh Party Congress.\*\* Nevertheless, at such periods Mao was not yet singled out as the leader and guide. The military leader Chu Teh and the administrator-negotiator Chou En-lai were of similar rank with Mao for a long period, and Liu Shao-chi was seen as also an important theoretician until quite recently; his How to Be a Good Communist, though now roundly attacked by Maoists as a revisionist "poisonous weed" betraying the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat,

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\* Cohen, A.A., The Communism of Mao Tse-tung. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964.

\*\* Wang Chao-lan, "Mao Tse-tung's Thought". Chinese Communist Affairs (Taipei) 4, No. 2, Apr. 1967, pp. 19-25.

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was revised and republished as recently as late 1962. Furthermore, until recently the promotion of Mao's works seemed rather different both in tone and in intensity. They were made available, but their study hardly overshadowed all other activities, and claims for their value seemed aimed at reasonably specific and apparently relevant goals. The main emphasis for a long time, characterized as "combining the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution", was on Mao's thought as a guide for applying Marxist theory to broad strategic problems of analysis and decisions in Chinese politics. Some relatively more specific practical foci and applications of Mao's thought also began to appear fairly early, as in an early work on how to conduct a survey of the situation among the peasants, writings on the proper strategy for conducting guerrilla warfare, and even Mao's analysis of and prescriptions for revolutionary literature and art,\*\* but the focus of these works was still practical or technical only in a rather general way, and the emphasis placed on them was not yet exclusive nor overwhelming.

"In the past few years, however, the degree of emphasis on Mao's thought, and on Mao as supreme and unique leader, has rapidly been increasing. At the same time, there has been an accompanying extension of the claimed area of applicability of "The Thought of Mao" especially to technical problems, yet a decrease in specificity as to just how it applies in such fields. The beginnings of these changes may perhaps be seen in the campaigns emphasizing "redness" - correct Chinese Communist political views - as more important than particular technical "expertness". This, for example, was a major theme in the 1959 Chinese Communist film "New Story of an Old Soldier". At any rate, such changes were well under way by the

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\* From an editorial in Jen-min Jih Pao, March 26, 1964, cited in China Notes 11, No. 4, July 1964 (China Committee, National Council of Churches of Christ, New York). Similar characterizations, however, were made as early as 1945 (Wang, loc. cit.).

\*\* Mao Tse-tung, Report on an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan (1927), Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1953; "Strategic Problems in the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla War" (1938), and "Problems of Art and Literature" (1942), both in Mao Tse-tung: An Anthology of His Writings, ed. by Anne Fremantle, New York, The New American Library (Mentor Books), 1962.

early 1960's:

"Study the thought of Mao Tse-tung.... At the moment this is the Party's first commandment and the theme of a current campaign for socialist education which took on new and unheard - of proportions in the winter of 1963-1964."\*

And from then on, this development has progressed still further. By the middle of 1964 it was being noted that earlier and more specific propaganda campaigns in China - that against early marriage in 1962, and "Learning from Lei Feng" (himself a model of social rather than individual consciousness due to his own study of Mao) in 1963 - had given way to direct and pervasive exhortation to "Study the Works of Mao Tse-tung" and to put his thought into practice for overcoming difficulties.\*\* The purported results of such study were publicised in thousands of "true stories" that are intended as model examples. They show how thousands of workers have seen the light and become devoted servants of the common good, and even more essential, have increased production - all from reading Mao Tse-tung:

A poor peasant in a commune learns to count and work an abacus to tote up his fellow team members' work-points because he's heard that Mao considers that man worthy of praise who bears the heaviest burdens. In a hospital a seriously sick woman whose husband knows nothing of her condition is able to get him on the phone because the operators know by heart Mao's phrases about their duty to serve the masses - they move heaven and earth to reach him. In the Shenyang market a vegetable vendor has learned enough to advise her clientele on the nutritional value of cabbages, roots, squash, fruit, and so on, because she read in Chairman Mao, "What we don't know, we must learn." She therefore learned about vitamins and calories. In Shanghai students who complained about having to interrupt their studies to go to work in a bicycle factory for their period of manual labor went off full of zeal after the Party had Mao's ideas on youth and

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\* Guillain, Robert, When China Takes. New York, Walker and Co., 1966 (First published in 1965). p. 207.

\*\* "Chinese Communism as Seen Through its Drives and Campaigns", China Notes, op. cit.

ideological reform read to them. In Peking a professional athlete became a champion after having discovered Mao's works and studied them, and a ping-pong champion owed her most splendid victories to this very study.\*

As Guillain comments, "Very often these stories seem silly", and this appears perhaps even more so for stories of scientific, engineering, or agricultural breakthroughs (as depicted in the film "New Story of an Old Soldier") than for sports victories (as in the film "Woman Basketball Player No. 5") The accounts of general tributes to Mao's thought, however, sound even more far-fetched to us:

"Mao's thought is like the sun", writes the Journal of the Army (March, 1964). "It is the highest wisdom of the Chinese people... The least deviation from his line of thought and we would be lost and defeated." In this same paper a soldier muses, "I am a green shoot, the masses are my soil, my officers and the Party are gardeners, but the thinking of Mao Tse-tung is my dew and my sun." Chinese Youth (July 1, 1963) writes: "As a fish cannot leave the water, nor the child his mother, revolutionary cadres can never leave the works of Mao." Red Flag (August 1, 1965): "In the past, present and future the thinking of Mao Tse-tung exists as the single correct compass for the work of our army." - "It is the lighthouse that illuminates our work and China's compass," said an announcer I heard on the air. And the People's Daily (March 26, 1964), national party newspaper, proclaim, "Without the sun the moon would give no light.... Without the study of Mao Tse-tung's thought, even if we kept our eyes open, we would be blind men."\*\*

Nevertheless, this was not the ultimate, but only a middle stage, followed by still more extreme developments with the onset of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which reportedly was "launched in fact, if not in name, at a secret meeting of the Central Committee / of the

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\* Guillain, op. cit., pp. 210-211.

\*\* Guillain, op. cit., pp. 213-214.



Chinese Communist Party<sup>7</sup>:- in late fall, 1965."\* The name and explicit emphasis on "Mao's Thought" in connection with this movement appear to date from mid-April 1966, when the Liberation Army Daily published an editorial entitled "Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thought and Actively Participate in the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution"<sup>\*\*</sup>. This deals mainly with "the class struggle in the ideological field" of literature and art, and concludes

We must regard Chairman Mao's writings as our supreme guide, seriously study and grasp his teachings on literature and art, and pay special attention to putting them into practice and creatively applying what we learn to our thinking and actions, so that we really master Mao Tse-tung's thought..... An upsurge of the great socialist cultural revolution has taken shape and is now assuming the form of a mass movement. This great revolutionary tide will wash away the mire of all the old bourgeois ideas on literature and art and usher in a new epoch of socialist proletarian literature and art. Confronted with this excellent revolutionary situation, we should be proud to be thoroughgoing revolutionaries. Our socialist revolution is a revolution to eliminate the exploiting classes and all systems of exploitation once and for all and to root out all exploiting class ideas which are injurious to the people. We must have the confidence and courage to do things never previously attempted. We must raise still higher the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought and, under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party, Chairman Mao and the Military Commission, actively participate in the great socialist literature and art worthy of our great country, our great Party, our great people and our great army.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

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\* "Chronology of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," China Notes 1V, No. 4, October 1966.

\*\* Reprinted in translation as the lead article in a series of seven pamphlets entitled The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China. Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1966 and 1967.

\*\*\* Loc. cit., No. 1, pp. 16-17.



Subsequent articles reprinted in this same series - though it provides only a small sample of Chinese propaganda outpourings of the period (for one example, by July 1966 nearly every issue of the Peking Review carried more than one major article on Mao's thought) - present seemingly endless stereotyped repetitions of the idea that since "Mao Tse-tung's Thought is the Telescope and Microscope of Our Revolutionary Cause" it must be used to destroy reactionary ideology in literature and art, to "Capture the Positions in the Field of Historical Studies Seized by the Bourgeoisie" to "Sweep Away All Monsters" that "have entrenched themselves in ideological and cultural positions", so that in "A New Stage of the Socialist Revolution in China" the people shall "Raise High The Great Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thought and carry the Great Proletarian Revolution Through to the End."\*

Only after this barrage of praise for Mao's thought in attacking "bourgeois" ideology had been going on for some months did the programmatic document "Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution"\*\*, appear. At this point in time, the situation was summed up by a foreign observer as follows:

"For the past seven months [that is, since about the beginning of 1966] the campaign to study the works and to learn the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung has dominated the Chinese scene, dwarfing all other campaigns and activities.

The cultural revolution and its attendant purge, even the war in Vietnam and the campaign to whip up public outrage against the American "imperialists" and the Russian "revisionists", have all been subordinate to, though part of, the campaign to raise the stature of Mao Tse-tung to a level unprecedented in any state in modern times. For the living Mao there is now a reverence that Lenin never knew in his lifetime.

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\* The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China, op. cit., passim.

\*\* Peking Review, 9, No. 33, Aug. 12, 1966.

Mao's thoughts are regarded as the key to knowledge and success in all fields. Without understanding them, neither the humblist peasant nor the most senior Party official can adequately perform his functions in Chinese society."

A further development, however, was yet to come. During the past year in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution the focus of attack, as the main opposition to Mao's thought, has increasingly shifted from creative and scholarly areas of ideology (plus some political figures of important but not commanding rank) to a concentration on the "reactionary, bourgeois ideology" of such main figures as Tao Chu and especially Liu Shao-chi, whose own political statements had formed lead articles in Peking Review as recently as the end of July 1966. At the same time promotion of the Thought of Mao has, almost incredibly, increased still more in scope and intensity. The content of Peking Review may again be taken as a serviceable index, and one less indigestible than any general review of the Chinese press and foreign reporting on the subject, which would be exceedingly repetitious. Peking Review formerly styled itself, with reasonable justification, "A Weekly Review of Chinese News and Views." It is certainly justifiable that this characterization was dropped from its cover at the start of 1967, since now, except for a few rather brief news reports, it regularly consists largely of reprintings of old writings by Mao, plus articles recurrently proclaiming that within China Mao's thought is leading the cultural revolution to great victories over the bourgeois revisionists who futilely - yet somehow persistently - oppose it, and a weekly section proclaiming that outside China "Mao's Thought Lights the Whole World." These materials are characterized also by a remarkable lack of any concrete content; they are extremely general, non-specific, and stereotyped in both style and content - even the citation of specific words of Mao in relation to particular situations is not frequent.

Much the same is true for the current intensive emphasis on Mao himself, which, following the model of Soviet attacks on Stalin, we often label as a "Cult of Personality." This is typified by lengthy but

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\* Denis Warner, San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle, August 21, 1966.

very sketchy accounts of Mao's public appearances or of his glowing state of health (both on the pattern of reports of his famous Yangtze River swim of July 1966) and the ubiquitous display of his portrait, which has appeared at the front of every single issue of Peking Review for more than a year now, except for the issue for National Day, October 1, 1967, which featured three of them - a cover picture, a front inner page picture, and a separate insert color portrait.

### III - "IT'S CRAZY!" - OUR RESPONSES TO "THE THOUGHT OF MAO"

Since all communication necessarily involves both a sender and a receiver, whose attitudes and styles must differ more or less, problems of misunderstanding may arise from both ends. The problems which stem from the unfamiliar nature to us of the Chinese Communist political and social scene must not be neglected, and will be considered later. Yet it is equally essential to recognize, despite of the added difficulties posed by the present hostility of United States-Chinese relationships, that in addition to any obscurity or complexity of Chinese Communist statements on this topic, our own viewing attitudes are very influential toward failure or success in understanding what "The Thought of Mao" is all about. Therefore some of our common viewing tendencies and their negative influences must now be examined, to help clear the field for a new and more positive approach toward understanding of what the Chinese Communist statements mean. Here again the level of examination will be quite broad, directed toward recognition of those general orientations which must crucially influence what is made of detailed observations.

Guillain in 1964 already thought that Chinese Communist praise of Mao's thought often sounded "silly". Today, with the current more extreme emphasis (only briefly summarized above) and little evident relation of "The Thought of Mao" to reality as we see it, foreign observers often find this campaign fantastic - in short, we consider that the Chinese glorification of Mao's personal image and their sweeping claims for his thought, in their empty stereotyped repetitiveness, are crazy. Guillain himself already noted that in one speech Khrushchev had advised Mao "to see a psychiatrist". This might be considered only as hasty words in the heat of Soviet-Chinese conflict,

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\* Guillain, op. cit., p. 172.

except that it has repeated parallels in American sources. Thus a year ago, in reporting on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the usually temperate National Council of Churches of Christ asked "what is this madness that sweeps China and astonishes the world" with its "fantastic and incredible contradictions" related to "the nonfunctional irrationality of Mao's thought".\* At the same period, Senator Ruchel refers to the cultural revolution and Red Guard activities as "the present madness" in China,\*\* and in the same characteristic vein an American editorialist writes on "Mao's Mixed-up Thoughts"\*\*\* Such examples could be multiplied at length from many diverse sources, even including similar remarks by some professional psychiatrists.

Although there is no single and simple American reaction to reports about "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung," this labeling as "crazy" appears of first importance; it is very common, and its essential feature - handling the problem by dismissing it - is also basic, though less sweeping, in several other typical responses. Aside from pure ignorance and inattention to the whole subject, of which there is still plenty,\*\*\*\* probably the two other main American responses to "The Thought of Mao" are that it is "only propaganda" or a form of "brainwashing," or more recently, that it is only a weapon in Chinese factional struggles. One import of all these views, whatever their accuracy in characterizing the functional role of the campaign, again is to dismiss the content of Chinese statements about Mao's thought as meaningless or unimportant, without seriously examining them.

A polar counterpart to this tendency toward quick dismissal also exists and should therefore be noted at this point. This is the tendency to assume much too readily that the meaning and significance of messages from some "foreign" source are clear and evident, without recognizing and taking seriously the fact that other people may be very different from us in their

\* China Notes, IV, No. 4, Oct. 1966, pp. 1,3.

\*\* Ruchel, Senator Thomas, "China's Mental Illness and the War in Vietnam." Congressional Record 112, No. 171, Oct. 7, 1966.

\*\*\* McGill, Ralph, "Mao's Mixed-up Thoughts," Palo Alto Times, March 10, 1967.

\*\*\*\* For example, a survey made by CBS News in 1966, in connection with a television Special Report on China (broadcast) found that many people did not even know who Mao is.

Cf. also "The Lack of Information", Part Four (pp. 139-201) in Steele, A.T., The American People and China. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1966.

premises of thought and conventions of communication, so that a message from them may not mean what we automatically think it does (and similarly for the interpretation of our messages by others); confident misinterpretation may easily result. This is not a common response to statements about the thought of Mao because these appear so extreme and unrealistic to us, but it is rather common in response to Chinese Communist pronouncements of opposition and hostility toward the United States, especially those in support of various national revolutionary movements, and it may be explicitly stated as an antithesis to dismissal. Thus a speech of President Johnson to the American Legion is reported as contrasting the possibility of viewing as "only rhetoric" Lin Biao's statements on "wars of liberation" with a presumably more cautious or realistic view of "assuming that the Chinese mean every word they say" until proven otherwise.\* It may also be noted that this "face value" kind of response is promoted by receiving messages in something other than their original form. In translating, for example, the usual aim is a smooth translation into good - that is, familiar and customary - English style, rather than close literal translation. This makes for easier and faster, but less questioning and probably less accurate, reading. Condensation and summarization, although common and often inescapable in dealing with a large volume of messages, continue further this trend toward increased ease and convenience at a cost of increased distance from the original message.

On the other hand, when some particular attention is given to "The Thought of Mao" it is usually at the level of isolated aspects or details, so that again there is little prospect for clarification and explanation of any main lines of the movement. Thus academic or other intellectual viewings, rather than examining the overall nature or functions of this movement itself, focus on questions - often invidious - of comparison or classification, such as distinguishing whether or not Mao's thought is really Marxist, or really unique,\*\* or distinguishing between "pure thought" and "action-oriented thought".\*\*\* Meanwhile, the more practical and "hard-nosed" Pekingologists, whether journalistic or governmental, are busy

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\* New York Times, Oct. 31, 1966.

\*\* Cf. Cohen, op. cit., Preface.

\*\*\* Cf. Schurmann, Franz, Ideology and Organization in Communist China. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1966.

centering their attention on such matters as the inapplicability or uselessness of "Mao's Thought" as a practical guide to technical or scientific areas where it is claimed to apply, or on presumed specific differences between Mao's ideas and those of his political rivals. All of these seemingly different viewings are alike in their detached, external viewpoint, their focus on details, and their consequent failure to approach any broad analysis of the intrinsic nature and significance of the movement as a whole.

It must be said that the common positions and responses described are natural in many respects, even though they are inadequate. Academic studies traditionally are limited and intellectualistic, just as reporters and officials traditionally are concerned about "facts" and immediate practicalities. Certainly, too, the flood of information available to us on "The Thought of Mao", though only a trickle compared to what the Chinese themselves are exposed to, is both boring in its stereotyped repetitiveness, and peculiar in content, tone, and emphasis, so that a tendency to dismiss it out of hand, whether as mere propaganda or sheer fantasy, is quite understandable. Furthermore, such responses of reduction or dismissal are not just careless or random; they have important functional bases. One of these, already implicit in the above remarks, is to rid ourselves of the troublesome, confusing, nagging problem of understanding which this movement continually presents - all the more important because of the extremes to which it being carried. Another function served by dismissal, especially by means of "craziness" or "propaganda" labeling, is that of attack, ridicule, discrediting - the putting down of a troublesome and threatening opponent. This functional aspect is illustrated with special clarity by its appearance in more extreme forms in Nationalist Chinese responses, which characterize the "Thought of Mao" as "absurd and superstitious lies", as "nothing new", and ultimately as "no thought at all."

Yet the matter cannot safely be allowed to rest at this point. As already pointed out, the very intensity of the "Thought of Mao" movement, whatever its particular characteristics, documents its importance for Chinese Communist politics and indicates that it makes some kind of sense to them, however fantastic or obscure it may at first look to us. The movement has

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\* Tang, op. cit., p. 24.



evident significance for Chinese international relations as well as internal politics, and thus is important to us directly. Our persistent reactions of dismissal have not made the movement really go away; it has, as described, become more extreme. It thus appears that our own interests would be better served by greater efforts to understand what the Maoists are about in this campaign - otherwise we do not even know what we are dismissing by our usual responses. Such understanding has no implication of uncritical acceptance; it is merely a first prerequisite if we wish to have a rational and flexible method of dealing with their verbal and behavioral messages - a method in which understanding, evaluation, and response are all maximally clear and separate.

An unusual but relevant and enlightening parallel may be given for the most extreme instance of such an aim, namely understanding and responding to statements about "The Thought of Mao" which strike us as really crazy, by considering the handling of the literally "crazy" communication of psychotic patients within our own society. Although more than six decades have passed since Freud began his efforts to understand and make sense of the communications of neurotics, as given in words, dreams, symptoms, and odd behavior, only 15 or so years ago the behavior and speech of psychotics were still considered thoroughly "crazy" - that is, as irrational and making no understandable sense. In the few years since, this viewpoint has changed greatly, until now it is widely recognized professionally that even the most peculiar and extraordinary statements and behavior of such patients regularly express some discernable sense related to the patient's own life experience and social contexts - especially his family context and the immediate context of interaction with an interviewer. And, of particular importance for our present concerns, this discovery has rapidly led toward new and more effective methods of treatment.\* That is, better understanding of what the patient is expressing, and of its dependence on the behavior and communication of others, has led to the discovery of ways of dealing with difficult behavior which are both more rationally based and more effective than previous means, and which depend on communicational, rather than physical or chemical, means of influence. It may be similarly valuable to look at some principles that were found to be basic in understanding such literally crazy communication, and see how they may be applied, mutatis mutandis, to getting a better grasp on "Mao's Mixed-up Thoughts".

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\* Cf. Watzlawick, Deavin, and Jackson, op.cit, esp. Ch. 3,7; Watzlawick, P., "A Review of the Double Bind Theory", Family Process 2,132-153(1963); Haley, J., Strategies of Psychotherapy, New York, Grune and Stratton, 1963.

#### IV - A POSITIVE GENERAL APPROACH TO "FOREIGN" POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

The preceding section has focused on some pervasive faults in our usual approaches to the "Thought of Mao" movement. This section is related by opposition; it attempts to outline explicitly a set of positive principles for better understanding of political communications, on which the next section's analysis of this movement is based, although their utilization there ordinarily is not specifically pointed out for reasons of convenience and readability. To make their relevance and significance clearer, these operative principles are presented within the context of a prefacing statement of principles about the nature of communication itself. Both presentations are broad in scope and statement, for the general reasons given earlier, and also because the problem of understanding foreign propaganda or other political communication is not unique, but a particular case of the general problem of understanding messages about human social interaction (which includes almost all but exclusively technical or scientific communications) that are exotic in origin - that is, messages whose contexts, premises, conventions, and styles of communication, in addition to their particular content, are likely to be unfamiliar to us. The most basic problems, and correspondingly the appropriate approach, in effective understanding of such communications relate to the nature of communication in general and to these broad types of difference and unfamiliarity, rather than to the particular source or subject of any given set of messages. Accordingly, the principles stated here are distilled from several sources - including the study of "crazy" communication in psychiatry, rather similar anthropological work directed toward making sense of the queer customs and beliefs of native groups, and the studies of implicit messages in Chinese films conducted as another part of this research project - and yet are generally relevant for application to the political case of "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung" movement.

Indeed, some of these principles about the nature of communication and its study may well appear to be just ordinary matters of common sense. Nevertheless, their statement together and in a systematic way is of value. It is just what should be evident that is often left implicit, applied irregularly, or otherwise neglected. Consistent and systematic application of basic principles is by no means easy, especially in such an emotionally



charged area as response to political communications, and failings at this level of basic orientations can not be controlled or repaired by rigor at the narrower level of detailed analytic procedures, since their influence on observations and findings is pervasive and general.

#### Principles - Communication and Interpretation

The most general principle about communication is so very simple that its significance and implications require considerable discussion:

- 1) All communication is composed of messages.

This means, on one hand, that messages exist and are real only as such - that is, as interrelated items within some conventional system of social communication about objects, events, ideas, and relationships, all of which in turn also are partially delimited and defined by the concepts and structure of the particular language or other communication system itself. On the other hand, this also means that any objects, events, or relationships to which messages refer are always necessarily different from the messages themselves, in two different ways: They are at a different level of "reality" or existence, and are more extensive. Messages, even at best, are comparable to theory in science; they are a sort of selective and shorthand form of pointing out, describing, or commenting on certain aspects of the world of existence and experience. The next two principles, of great practical importance, follow directly from this.

- 2) Communications are always potentially understandable, to some degree, but are never fully self-evident.

Since messages are different from but related to their referents, communication necessarily involves encoding into messages by a source and decoding by a receiver. Therefore interpretation of messages, although it may be habitual and not conscious, is always a crucial part of communication.\*

This principle underlies and sums up previous discussion about the probability of misunderstanding when messages are either dismissed as incomprehensible, or too readily accepted as self-evident. To take

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\* It should also be noted that where there is social contact, communication is essentially ubiquitous; "there is no not communicating." Behavior provides messages as well as language. Even silence, in a social context, is a message, and one whose significance obviously varies with the society and situation in which it occurs.

a message at "face value" really means to interpret it unconsciously according to some habitual system - which may differ greatly from the sender's system, while dismissal denies the possibility or value of interpretation..

3) Messages are only statements; they are neither true nor false.

This principle goes against the grain of common usage, but for good reasons. From the preceding description it is clear that as such a message, being of a different order from its referents, merely exists as a statement. The dichotomy of "true" vs. "false", like similar ones such as "rational" vs. "irrational" or "realistic" vs. "unrealistic" can only have meaning in reference to relationships between messages and their referents. Such a reference may be implicit in ordinary labeling of messages as true or as false, but this referential aspect is thereby left unclear or even obscured. Moreover, such dichotomous distinctions are often much too simple and limited to be appropriate for accurate analysis of these relationships. Such over-simplification further promotes acceptance of false alternatives, both of which are misleading, like that between blanket rejection of messages as "just propaganda" and blanket acceptance as "truth". Some potential complexities of relationships between messages and referents which must be recognized and taken into account will be surveyed next.

4) Every message has multiple meanings.

The import of this principle may be conveyed by a series of related and complementary statements whose primary foci are on different aspects of this complexity. A major duality in the significance of messages was first pointed out by Bateson in the statement that every message in transit is both a report and a command: "On the one hand, the message is a statement or report about events at a previous moment, and on the other hand it is a command - a cause or stimulus for events at a later moment."\* This view of messages stresses their duality in terms of cause-result and temporal sequence, but it also begins to point toward recognizing that all messages are both informative - via their expressive and descriptive aspects - and influential, via responses which both these aspects induce. This complex idea may

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\* Ruesch, J. and Bateson, G., Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry. New York, Norton, 1951. p. 179.

be resliced in yet another way, by distinguishing between the content aspect of any message - that is, its manifest subject or topic, which is closely related to ordinary conceptions of "information" - and its relationship aspect - that is, its significance for the interaction of sender and receiver, which is more related to "expression" and "reaction."

These considerations provide warnings against simplistic viewing, although they probably do not exhaust all the significant complexities that may exist in the relationships between messages and their referents in "reality", including the communicators themselves. In addition, another type of complexity must also be recognized.

- 5) Communication always involves a multiplicity of interrelated messages, which must be considered jointly.

There is no such thing as a simple, single message - one whose meaning is clear and unmistakable by itself, much as we might desire this. This statement is largely equivalent to the common idea that any message can only be understood in relation to its context, except that this notion of context ordinarily is little explored, and far too limited in scope. At least two interconnected but analytically distinguishable types of interrelatedness among messages must be considered; these concern sequences and multiple levels.

First, any given message at a certain level - for example, a verbal statement - is necessarily related to other similar messages, by the same party or by some other, in an ongoing communicational interchange. It is obvious that the significance of statement B in a series A-B-C depends on the preceding statement A, although some of the possible kinds of dependence are so complex and subtle as to be far from readily evident. It is less obvious, and therefore perhaps more important to note, that the meaning of B may also depend strongly on subsequent messages, which inescapably must either reinforce or modify what was stated earlier. The sequence of messages that may need to be considered for reasonably reliable interpretation of any selected message may be extensive.

Second, any given message at a certain level is always accompanied, and its significance influenced, by the simultaneous existence of related messages at other levels. For verbal messages,

these may involve other fairly isolable and specific channels of communication, such as vocal tone, facial expression, or bodily posture or movement. Or there may be, as in written messages, more general factors such as the style of expression and type of communication (e.g., letters, telegrams, official dispatches). And both verbal and written messages must originate in relation to some setting, in fact a whole hierarchy of settings ranging all the way from the immediate situation of place and occasion to the overall socio-cultural environment.

Thus, to consider a message in its context, which is essential for its accurate understanding, potentially means that all the above complex and subtle interrelations need be taken into account.

#### Principles - Analytic Approach

The principles that have just been discussed are primarily descriptive, concerned with outlining at a conceptual level the relationship of the nature of communication itself to the general problem of accurate interpretation of messages. On the basis of this essential foundation, a set of practical principles may now be stated, which are concerned with prescribing a basic attitude and approach that promote accurate analysis and understanding of any actual set of foreign messages. Because of the nature of language these principles must necessarily be stated in some sequence, but in correspondence with the systematic nature of communication itself, they are all interrelated and overlapping to a considerable extent.

##### 1). Look at the communicative data first as messages of a sender.

That is, examine statements first and foremost as statements, looking at what is said and how it is said. Considerations of meaning, motive, and relations to "reality" should be deferred since these, like preconceptions and second-hand comments, tend to obscure one's view of the original messages as such. Also, statements must first be considered in relation to their source. The different context of a receiver, even if it is wider, more comprehensive, or in some way superior, initially is likely only to increase difficulties of understanding, although it may well be brought in later.

##### 2) Take and maintain a positive viewpoint.

There are two aspects to this principle. First, it is important deliberately to look for what immediately or potentially makes sense, rather than nonsense - and the more foreign the source, the more easily this may be missed. If messages really contain nonsense,

this can hardly be skipped - it will always be left over after a positive search is exhausted. But if the focus is on the deficiencies of a message first, it is easy to dismiss it without ever discovering anything else.

The second aspect is in part a means toward the first: Messages being studied should as far as possible be viewed, described, and characterized in positive, intrinsic terms, rather than in negative and comparative terms. The aim is toward developing a basic characterization of what a message is, rather than a statement of what it is not. A negative characterization only promotes the separation of its object from all else; a positive characterization provides some ground for generalization and interrelating, the bases of all logical order and understanding.

3) Aim toward a holistic view of the message data.

The analytic aim should be toward a unified, overall view of any message or set of messages being studied rather than a mere batch of separate observations, yet a view which does not distort the data by imposing any inappropriate external structure upon them. This goal is predicated upon the premise, supported by theory and experience, that any series of statements or messages on a particular topic from one source will possess an inherent order. Indeed, this belief is implicit in the choice of a group of statements as a subject for study, and the implicit premise should be followed up by explicit search for all the internal order and unity that can be found.

Two different but closely interwoven lines of analysis are central in seeking out such order. First, there is the search for main themes in the body of messages - what the messages are mainly about. Again, this means not what a receiver evaluates as most important, but what is most general or fundamental in the messages as such, and thus presumably for the sender. Such importance is often indicated by the recurrence of some matter, though it also may be indicated by some other form of emphasis. Complementary to this search for main themes is the search to discern how such themes (and also more limited aspects of the messages) fit together into patterns and systems within the whole body of messages. Ultimately, this may include, often in very enlightening ways, even aspect which at first

seemed exceptional or contradictory, or stages of development in a communication sequence.\*

4) Focus attention on the original data.

This simply means that to the maximum feasible extent, attention should be devoted to close and careful examination of the actual statements of interest, minimizing reliance on descriptions, characterizations, or summaries made by other parties, or on preconceptions. Exploration of the raw data, although important throughout, is especially crucial at the outset of any study.

5) Consider messages in relation to all contexts of discernable importance.

As indicated earlier, many contexts of different sort and scope may all be relevant for interpretation of any given messages. These cannot all be exhaustively studied; ultimately and logically this task is infinite - like many other problems in human living. Practical compromises with the ultimate requirements for sure understanding are therefore necessary. In dealing with familiar messages, there is much automatic and unconscious reliance on experience and habit. The more exotic the source of a message and the greater its importance, however, the less this is safe and adequate, and the greater the need for deliberate and extensive consideration of such contexts as the source of a message, the occasion and audience, the general political situation, related messages, conventions of communication, and general cultural conceptions and premises. Yet in practice even a reasonable amount of such contextual examination, in connection with the other principles given here, ordinarily will suffice to clarify the basic import of messages being studied, or at least to prevent serious misinterpretation and indicate where further examination is needed.

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\* An extended general discussion of the nature of this approach as it relates to analysis of the inherent order of whole cultures is presented in Weakland, John H., "Method in Cultural Anthropology", Philosophy of Science, 18, No. 1, 55-69(1951).

A related briefer discussion is presented, and applied to the analysis of Chinese Communist films, in Weakland, John H., Chinese Political and Cultural Themes; A Study of Chinese Communist Films, U.S. Naval Ordnance Test Station, China Lake, California (NOTS TP4029), August 1966.

## V - "THE THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG" - THE MOVEMENT ANALYZED

As a slogan, "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung" is a single term. Yet even the brief review of its promotion by the Chinese Communists given already indicates that despite some persisting similarities there have been important developments and changes in reference for this term. Indeed, it appears that there have been three different major emphases in the movement, which heretofore have not been sufficiently distinguished and discriminated, and that these have appeared as major although not exclusive foci in successive time periods. Thus, although this correlation admittedly is only partial, a certain clarification can be produced by considering the total movement in terms of three phases: A long first phase promoting Mao's thought as adaptive in "combining the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution"; a middle phase of emphasis on the originality of Mao's thought and its value in solving problems of science, technology, and production specifically; and a third phase, still continuing, of extreme yet abstract glorification of Mao's thought and Mao himself as a unique general guide to correct and effective socio-political attitudes. Associated with these differences there are, more particularly, considerable differences in the apparent sense or nonsense of the movement's claims.

While these discriminations initially help to clarify the complexity of the overall movement by sub-dividing it, in relation to the holistic viewing recommended earlier they pose, in addition to the problem of understanding each of the diverse phases, a major problem about what unity can be found amid this diversity. What is the explanation of each phase, and can the three-phase movement be seen as a whole? These problems will now be approached as follows: First, each phase will be re-examined, separately and in succession. After identification of the period in question, attention will be focused on the relationships between the character of the movement, what sense it seems to make, and the existing context. This means that in each instance, account must be taken on the one hand 1) of Mao's own official and functional position; 2) of the nature and extent of his own writings and speeches; 3) of the nature and extent, similarly, of Chinese Communist pronouncements about "Mao's thought" and about Mao himself; and 4) of the general political context - both the internal Chinese context and the related international context. On the other hand, attention must



also be given to examining our usual standards of judging sense and nonsense for the specific kind of situation or claims existing in that phase - a particular instance of considering the influence of our own viewings. The aim of this procedure is to expand and clarify our views of each phase, one by one. After this, the overall situation can be looked at again, to see what unity may exist, what line of development throughout the long-term movement, and what may be expectable in the future.

#### The First Phase - Apprenticeship and Application

The first phase is unique and of special interest precisely because, in contrast to both succeeding phases, it does not pose any great problem of understanding apparent nonsense, since for this era the presentation of "Mao's thought" seems reasonably understandable from the outset. Yet it is still in order to examine this period, and not to skip past it. Attention given here to understanding "sense" - how and why this phase looks acceptable to us - can help in understanding "nonsense" - how and why the later phases of the movement look so different and strange.

This phase may be taken as lasting from the 1930's until the late 1950's. During about two-thirds of this period the Chinese Communists were mainly engaged in the revolutionary struggles and guerrilla warfare which eventually brought them to national power, while in the final third they were mainly engaged in consolidating their national position, building a governmental and economic structure, and establishing international relations, both within and outside the Communist bloc. During both, they considerably looked toward, and up to, the Soviet Union as the leader of Communism, though in two different ways. During their revolution the Chinese Communists received little direct or material support from Russia, but they did take Marxism-Leninism as a doctrinal guide, seeing the Soviet Union as a proof of the correctness of Communist revolutionary theories and therefore as a historical model to be followed - with some adjustments and revisions. After national power was attained, the Soviet Union continued to be a model, now for socio-economic construction and development, and also became a direct source of aid, in money, goods, and in technical experts - thus also providing a direct teaching function.

During this era, as mentioned, Mao's position was largely presented as that of a "first among equals" in China, and this indeed seems to correspond rather well with his actual functioning as an active top leader



and strategist closely accompanied and supported by major associates of other bents and activities. This was also the period of Mao's greatest productivity in writing and speeches, so that most of "The Thought of Mao" as such dates from this time. As already noted, most of the content of this work was explicitly concerned, in detail or broadly, with development and application of classical Communist doctrine to the situation in China. Chinese Communist characterizations of Mao's thought as "combining the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution" - minor in extent compared to later periods - seem to agree rather well with all this. Correspondingly, also, Mao's position in relation to that of the Russian leaders - certainly to Stalin - was presented largely as that of "younger brother", just as China at this period repeatedly labeled itself as the "younger brother" of the Soviet Union in the "progressive family" of socialist countries.

In sum, then, what we find in this period is quite extensive congruences - between Mao's position, functions and statements as such, or as they appear to us, and the way they are characterized by the Chinese Communists more or less formally and officially, and between all of this and its evident context of Chinese revolutionary goals and struggles. That is, we may reject both Mao's goals, such as revolution and the emulation of the Soviet Union, and his means such as guerrilla warfare and political direction of literary work. Yet in relation to such explicitly defined goals, Mao's own statements of means, and echoing comments on them by the other Chinese Communists, seem reasonably relevant and adaptive. This mutual relevance of ends and means, despite any political or moral dislike for them, thus appears as central to our judgement of this phase as understandable.

#### The Second Phase - Independence and Innovation

In the second phase the situation is very different. This period, in fact, is especially interesting and potentially informative just because it seems so mixed, in contrast both to the relative clarity of the first phase and to the pervasive extremism of the third phase. In this middle phase, the context again seems clear enough, and the major goals of the movement can fairly readily be discerned and related to this context. It is even possible without too much difficulty to see the movement, at the level of means, as politically adaptive. But in the economic-industrial

sphere, just where the goals are closest to our own interests and values, the nature of the "Thought of Mao" movement now looks very ill-suited as means.

This phase may be taken as beginning somewhere around 1958, but being in full swing from late 1963 to late 1965. (Since there is considerable overlapping and transition not only for the movement as such but also for the related contexts, precise dating is not significant for the basic line of explanation here, and attempts in that direction probably would only obscure broad fundamental relationships.) This is the era of the instigation and subsequent collapse of China's economic-industrial "Great Leap Forward", the departure of Soviet technicians in 1960, reduction of Soviet aid generally, and the growing political conflict and rupture between China and the Soviet Union. In the earlier period the major tasks facing the Chinese Communists had been to take power and rebuild an economy, both by following and adapting the Soviet model. Now, although the Chinese Communists were much stronger and more established, the Soviet Union was, increasingly, no longer either a reliable source of direct help nor an appropriate, acceptable model and inspiration. Thus the problem of China going it on its own - both economically and politically - was simultaneously more possible and more urgent.

In this period and context Mao's actual writing and speaking, at least for general theoretical or policy statements, appears to drop off greatly although, significantly, he did make some statements on international affairs, both opposing "U.S. imperialism" and denouncing Russian "revisionism".\* But it was also in this context that the first "Great Leap Forward" in the promotion of Mao's thought and in the elevation of Chairman Mao as supreme leader occurred. In particular, it was during this period that claims for the originality of "Mao's Thought" as a new development in Communist doctrine - "Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao Tse-tung" - rather than as mainly an application, began to be asserted and emphasized.\*\* And although Mao's personal position and political power in China at this period could hardly have been significantly greater than they were already throughout the 1950's, Chinese Communist propaganda now began increasingly to single out and elevate Mao individually as the great leader of the Chinese Revolution.

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\* E.g., on the one hand, Statements by Mao Tse-tung Calling on the People of the World to Unite to Oppose the Aggressive and Bellicose Policies of U.S. Imperialism and Defend World Peace (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1964), and on the other, a number of statements forming part of "On Khrushchov's Phony Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World" (July 14, 1964), some of which are included in Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1965).

\*\* Cf. Guillain, op.cit., p. 186.

This phase of the movement thus is clearly marked by greater distance and difference between Mao's own writings and activities, and the general claims made for them by the Chinese Communists, than was the case for the first phase. Yet, in the context of the split with the Soviet Union and growing rivalry within the world Communist system, it is understandable that the Chinese - for whom convictions of "rightness" and certainty, usually based on some historical model, ancient or recent, have always seemed essential for inspiring and validating action - should now put increasing emphasis on the chief available "native" model of doctrine, "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung," and correspondingly on its author also. At the same time, the greater this Chinese-Soviet split, the greater the responsibility attached to Mao's leadership of China and the greater his international importance, even if his domestic position and duties remain much the same - in fact, a regenerative cycle of interaction is developed.

In addition to such immediately political aspects of the movement, however, in this phase Mao's thought began to be highly emphasized as offering solutions for all kinds of problems of technology and production. In the existing context of "going it alone", again it is not difficult to recognize the need for such solutions and their importance as goals, for China directly, and also for China as self-appointed leader and mentor for other industrially underdeveloped countries. This leaves only one problem, but a major one: "The Thought of Mao" as promoted appears very inappropriate for this purpose. In fact, the severity of this apparent contradiction in a field where Americans are world leaders clearly has been a main, if not a predominant, source of our attitudes of puzzlement or dismissal toward the whole movement. This therefore now requires special attention.

As already mentioned, by the early 1960's "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung" was increasingly being hailed as the key to success in many kinds of practical activities. In many early and simple instances this probably was largely an appeal and prescription for diligence, persistence, and cooperation among the people similar to that depicted in the 1959 film New Story of an Old Soldier, in which a former member of the Eighth Route Army is sent by the Party to grow grain in virgin lands in Manchuria; by determination and hard work he succeeds despite the rigors of the weather, his own inexperience, and the over-cautious obstructionism of a scholarly agricultural expert sent to assist in the work. Such a means of promoting production still needs

little explanation, although it should be pointed out that it is especially relevant to the cultural context; in China both individual action and co-operative interaction have traditionally been based on the deliberate performance by individuals of given roles of social behavior and character, which have been defined from above and inculcated by extensive exhortation to follow the models presented.

By the mid-1960's, however, the scope of claims for Mao's thought in this area were much more startling: "as an example of the extremes to which the Mao cult is carried, I was shown a hydraulic press which handles steel ingots up to 300 tons and told of the part Mao's writings had played in its design and construction. It was only by studying the Communist boss's precepts that the engineers had arrived at the correct decisions, I was told!"\* The note of disbelief in this Western author's account is already evident, and easy for us to share, but this is still a minor example compared to our common scorn and incredulity when we hear of such accounts in the Peking Review as "The Battle to Make Our Oxygen Cylinders" with the aid of Mao's thought,\*\* and even "Relying on 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' to Make a Chinese-Type Frequency Clock",\*\*\*. Such things must be nonsense; we know too well that the solution of scientific and technical problems requires factual information plus hard-headed rational thinking, that Mao never had any technical or scientific experience, and that his works, except perhaps some parts on guerrilla warfare, are general and even philosophical in nature - how could they be relevant?

Yet this can still be a situation in which we interpret and draw a simple conclusion too easily and readily. We might recall that training for the Chinese imperial bureaucracy, which for many centuries effectively operated a non-technological but vast, complex and highly rationalized administrative system, consisted of rote study of the ancient Chinese classics; these were hardly closer to their practical tasks than "The

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\* Topolski, Feliks, "Maoism is Red China's New Religion." Palo Alto Times, Aug. 2, 1966.

\*\* Meng Teh-ho, Peking Review 9, No. 30, July 22, 1966, p.23.

\*\*\* Fang Fu-ken, Peking Review 9, No. 25, June 17, 1966, p. 25.

"Thought of Mao" is to science and engineering. Perhaps we know our own technology too well - in the sense that we are now so accustomed to a highly technological culture that we focus almost exclusively on its immediate aspects - facts, procedures, rationality, expertness and explicitness - and take for granted any more general context in which these are operative. Therefore, when the Chinese Communists bring up questions of technology, these are the sort of factors we expect to find mentioned, and this kind of expectation is reinforced by the very term "Thought of Mao", since in this context particularly the natural and automatic connotation of "thought" for us is "rationality". We find very little of these factors in Chinese Communist propaganda on Mao's thought in the solution of technical problems, especially on cursory examination, and naturally we conclude that this line of propaganda is arrant nonsense.

There is, however, a further and very general factor involved in successful technical work, namely its social and psychological context, and when this is taken account of the above picture changes greatly. Ordinarily this context is scarcely considered in our society because, being already accustomed to familiarity and confidence with technology, and to positive attitudes toward further innovation, the context provides a positive foundation rather than problems.\* The situation faced by the Chinese Communists is very different. China has long been a highly conservative and traditional society; that is, both individual inclination and social pressures there favored certainty achieved by adherence to customary ways, and avoidance of the new, different and problematic. In addition - though also partly an effect of this traditional orientation - most of the limited Chinese experience of modern science and technology has been under the domination and control of foreigners, or at best a Westernized Chinese elite, further leading to lack of general self-confidence in this area of endeavor. From this angle, even in this area the "Thought of Mao" movement might legitimately be largely concerned not with "rationality" but with morale - with inspiration, encouragement, promotion of convictions of ability and of

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\* We ordinarily forget that even in Western civilization this state of affairs is relatively recent, historically, and that our present economic-technological system itself arose in close connection with ideological developments, as discussed, for example, in Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Tr. by Talcott Parsons, New York, Scribner, 1950.)

the possibility and rightness of change - in a way that is quite similar to the nature and functioning of this propaganda in the political area, as described. The promotion of "Mao's thought", on this view, but put into terms more familiar to us, is essentially the promotion of Mao's feeling and conviction that the Chinese themselves can on their own do much that they have not done before, both politically and technically.

This interpretation is confirmed by a more thorough look at what the Chinese Communists themselves really say, repeatedly and in various sources. For instance, at the simple and popular level of films, an emphasis on confidence and daring to go ahead - to break new ground figuratively as well as literally - already is also evident in New Story of an Old Soldier, while in a 1958 film about the Ming Tombs dam project, Singing Above the Reservoir, the development and dissemination of new construction techniques is a major theme. At more complex levels, when the Peking Review pieces on making oxygen cylinders and frequency clocks are read carefully, it becomes evident that they discuss the relevance of "The Thought of Mao" to these tasks rather explicitly in terms of morale factors - willingness to experiment, confidence in one's own abilities, lack of dependence on foreign models or conservative authorities, and so on. Thus, the maker of oxygen cylinders, a former tinsmith, first had to meet Chinese conservatism, then Soviet opposition:

I immediately joined the other comrades in experiments, to improve our cylinders. We had the backing of the Party organization. But there were a few who....tried to throw cold water on the whole thing. They said "These tinsmiths are only able to put together a dustpan. Yet they are thinking of making oxygen cylinders. They are nothing but toads trying to eat swan flesh".....[But] We refused to be discouraged when we heard all this....You can say what you like; we will go on with what we are doing. A few sarcastic remarks will not shake our determination.

The workers made some progress; then the author was sent with a delegation to the Soviet Union, but was not permitted to see their oxygen cylinder factory. He was outraged.

I picked up my copy of Chairman Mao's selected works and began reading. In one passage, Chairman Mao said: "We stand for self-reliance. We hope for foreign aid, but not be dependent on it;



we depend on our own efforts, on the creative power of the whole army and the entire people." These words gave me a big lift and I told myself: The foreigners have two hands; so have we. They each have a brain; so have we. What is there to stop us making what they have made? It is impossible to believe that a country with a population of 650 million people can't even make a good oxygen cylinder. Let the imperialists go on with their embargo. Let the revisionists go on with their blockade. They won't frighten us. We will rely on our own efforts. We will prove ourselves by making an oxygen cylinder!"

Similarly, Pang the clock worker met with discouragement from traditionalists when he produced a bold new idea:

Some told me: "This can be tried out, but if this path leads anywhere, others would have been sure to have gone down it long ago." If others have not explored this path, I said to myself, that made it all the more necessary for me to explore it. Everything must be tested in practice.

In this he was relying on Mao's "On Practice":

Chairman Mao says: "Our chief method is to learn warfare through warfare....it is often not a matter of first learning and then doing, but of doing and then learning, for doing is itself learning"...

Chairman Mao teaches us: "The movement of change in the world of objective reality is never ending and so is man's cognition of truth through practice." The experience of others is not fixed and immutable; we are not only able but we are duty bound to enrich and improve on their experience....Only by breaking with the old concepts can we understand and create new things; only by breaking with conventions, daring to challenge all the "authorities," can we develop new techniques and strike out along our own path.\*\*

Similar messages can be found - on looking - throughout many Chinese Communist publications of the period, for instance a summing up of this whole set of themes under the label "Break the Cult of Foreign Technology, Develop Creativeness."\*\*\*

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\* Meng, loc. cit., pp. 23, 24.

\*\* Pang, loc. cit., p. 27.

\*\*\* Translated from Peking Jen-min Jih-pao, November 13, 1965, in Survey of Mainland China Press No. 3508, p. 3, December 1965.

Furthermore, it is now being recognized even in our own society that such factors are directly significant in technical work, especially when a major goal is innovation and creative development - which, as noted, is so important an aspect in the Chinese context. For example, the general problem of technical creativity and the conditions which promote it has been studied over many years by Gordon, a highly practical man who has made a successful career as an industrial consultant in this field.\* His work comes out as very congruent with the Chinese views we have been examining. Thus, he finds that "in the creative process the emotional component is more important than the intellectual, the irrational more important than the rational," and in a chapter explicitly concerned with "The Commonplace and Expertise", he discusses the dangers of "learned conventions" which "can be windowless fortresses which exclude viewing the world in new ways",\*\* in contrast to the possibility of obtaining new ideas toward the solution of technical problems by using analogies based on familiar everyday observation and experience. In the light of one of Gordon's examples, which describes the successful development of a dripless dispenser modeled after the action of a horse's anus, Meng's account of the conception of one of his ideas for the making of oxygen cylinders, does not seem too wild:

He went everywhere and searched for data in bookstores for a way to bring the top of the cylinder to a cone-shaped point. Once, while I was working in the kitchen, I saw the cooks making baozi (steamed dumpling). The way they pinched the dough to enclose the filling and seal the top made me think: Wasn't this the same principle for the mechanical drawing of a cone-shaped point to our cylinders? However, dough can be squeezed together by hand, but what can be used to do this to a red-hot cylinder blank? Later, while visiting a machine forging works, I saw a steam hammer used to forge steel ingots. This struck me as just like working with dough.\*\*\*

Approaching the same problem area in a different way, a work by an American industrial psychologist presents the following account of how an

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\* Gordon, L.J.J., Synectics: The Development of Creative Capacity. New York, Harper and Row, 1961.

\*\* Op. cit., p. 92.

\*\*\* Meng, op. cit., p. 24.



experimental program in creative thinking was set up in a manufacturing plant, and the factors considered of main importance:

The first twenty minutes of the session were devoted to a talk by the production manager of the plant. The talk was designed to accentuate the importance of innovation to the company. At this first stage, it was necessary to link the production of new ideas to the expectation of success and reward in the company. Examples were provided showing how changes in product lines, purchasing and production gave the company a competitive edge. Hopefully the quite realistic notion would be established that the company recognized it had an untapped resource in the creative potential of its management personnel, and it was prepared to receive new ideas.

It was expected that this exhortative presentation, although vitally needed, would arouse anxiety because it involved a sudden and unusual demand on the subjects. Therefore the following twenty minutes were devoted to a talk by the experimenter on the topic "blocks to creativity." This talk was structured to answer three anticipated interferences with productivity at the session, namely the thoughts: (1) "I am not capable of having new ideas;" (2) "People laugh at things new and unusual, and I will meet social resistance;" (3) "If I try to change things, I will get in trouble with the people who are used to doing things the old way. The boss won't like it." To allay the first anxiety, fear of incapability, examples were presented showing how individuals are creative in their day-to-day lives whenever a problem is presented and the old solutions are not feasible (e.g. "when your wife uses a couple of hair pins and a paper napkin if she can't find the baby's bib.") For the second anxiety, fear of social ridicule, it was emphasized that all creative men were men who believed in themselves, and it was usually they who had the last laugh (e.g. "Fulton's Folly, the first steam boat.") As for meeting fear of resistance from the establishment, the subjects were told not to write their names on the Exercise in Creative Thinking that was to be handed out (e.g. "here the man who owns the horses will not know the identity of the man who is inventing the gasoline engine.")\*

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\* Green, Michael, "An Exercise in Creativity: A Short Program." Unpublished report, Stanford University, 1937.

with the one exception that in the Chinese context at least the Maoist faction of the establishment actively promotes and recognizes technical change as desirable, rather than opposing it, the parallels again are very close.

Thus even in this technical area where "The Thought of Mao" movement at first glance seems wildly irrelevant, there is an important element of basic sense to be discerned. This of course does not mean that Chinese Communist claims, once understood, should be swallowed whole; it is still quite possible or even likely that more exhortation is given than is effectively received, that technical successes achieved in this way are overplayed and failures minimized, and also that experts and expertise are unduly maligned in attempting to counter their conservative influences. But it does mean that without close and careful study of the movement, not just the answers but even the central questions are not self-evident.

#### The Third Phase - The Lofty Leader

It is more difficult to discriminate clearly between the second and third phases of the "Thought of Mao" movement than to delimit the first phase because there is more overlapping, yet significant differences in focus and emphasis make such a distinction possible and valuable. Although some references to technology and production are still observable recently, they are less frequent and much more abstract and general in content,\* while the continuing political claims for Mao's thought become much stronger and more sweeping. Now Mao's thought does not merely add certain new elements to Marxism-Leninism, but appears almost to supersede it as the only true ideology, the unique guide and guarantee for correct and successful cultural and political attitudes. Indeed, the hallmark of this phase appears to be extremism and grandiosity in characterization of Mao's thought and especially Mao himself, highly stereotyped and endlessly repeated.

This phase may be taken as roughly coinciding with the period of The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, beginning in late 1965 and still continuing. The most important context for this period is that of internal politics - the struggles among the Chinese Communists between the Mao and Liu Shao-chi factions, which after skirmishes on the "cultural"

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\* E.g., "Mao Tse-tung's Thought - Banner of Victory in Scaling the Heights of Science and Technology", Peking Review 42, No. 42, Oct. 14, 1966, p. 16.

front, have become increasingly open and central. The continuing conflicts with "American imperialism" and "Soviet revisionism," though still significant, now largely appear in relation and as secondary to the Chinese internal struggle. This is exemplified by the recurrent use of the label "China's Khrushchov" to refer to and attack Liu Shao-chi; this terminology keeps up the old attacks on "Soviet revisionism" but now the main target clearly is Liu and his supporters.

In this period, apart from an occasional sentence attributed to Mao in articles by others there are practically no new statements by Mao himself. Even when Peking Review occasionally reports that Mao received a delegation or appeared at a rally, it is usually said at most that he gave a formal greeting, or often only that he waved to the faithful. In fact, there is even relatively little quotation from his works, although their publication on a wide scale both at length and in the "little red book" of excerpts is reported, and some of his older works are reprinted at times in Peking Review. Speeches and articles by colleagues such as Lin Biao and Chou En-lai, and editorials, though they constantly refer to Mao and his thought, cite him directly only briefly if at all. Peking Review does begin each issue with a page of quotations from his previous writings, but this rapidly comes to seem like a symbolic text rather than a living message - and quite comparable in this respect with the portraits of Mao which recurrently appear on the next facing page, labeled as "Our great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander and great helmsman."

In a rather similar way, for some time there has been little specific information available on Mao's actual political position, or on his personal state of health, although recent Chinese political upheavals, increasing conflict with the Soviet Union, and his advancing age necessarily raise questions about both. In great contrast to this dearth of actual statements, appearances, or factual information - yet somehow linked by the common absence of concrete content - there is concurrently a continuous flood of extreme claims about Mao's thought and Mao himself as a great leader. Where first Mao spoke for himself as applying Marxism to China, and then later there were claims for the originality of his political thought, now the Chinese put Mao forward as the leader of world Communism, and Peking Review proclaims in each issue that "Mao Tse-tung's Thought Lights the Whole World" - yet China has met reverses as well as successes

in the struggle for Communist and world leadership, while the section mentioned presents little more than rather simple general tributes to Mao reported to come from various people in different countries scattered about the world. In style and content, in fact, these tributes seem more like patent medicine or fundamentalist religious testimonials than anything else. Claims about Mao and the internal Chinese scene are very similar, as typified in the song "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman" and articles claiming, with no details, that due to Mao's thought "The Situation is Better than Ever Before." The case is again very similar for more personal statements about Mao, as in a recent report that "Our Great Leader Chairman Mao Is In Excellent Robust Health",\*\* which only reports a report to this effect made by an official to a People's Liberation Army Air Force meeting, with no concrete specification whatever as to where, when, or how the official himself determined this. Indeed, this pervasive abstractness, generality, and lack of specific detail somehow has the effect of increasing identification between "Mao's Thought" and Mao the person - with both becoming less real and concrete, more symbolic.

With the existence of such great discrepancies between what can be discerned of Mao's actual current position and situation, and the extreme claims now made for Mao and for his thought, we tend to view this phase of the movement as quite fantastic in general, and as personally megalomaniac - a "Cult of Mao". There are, however, wider contexts than that of the immediate practical political situation, and taking account of these again is helpful in understanding the "fantastic".

Although it may at first seem an unlikely source of political enlightenment, we may take a clue from the National Council of Churches. Already in 1964, in an article on "Chinese Communism As Seen Through Its Drives and Campaigns", they said:

Many observers of Communism have noted that this essentially political, social, and economic movement bears many marks of a religious movement. The observer will usually qualify the term religion by a prefix such as "pseudo-" or "quasi-", but the religious elements are unmistakable.

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\* Jen Li-hsin, "The Situation is Better Than Ever Before", Peking Review 10, No. 47, Nov. 17, 1967, p. 8.

\*\* Peking Review 10, No. 41, Oct. 6, 1967, p. 12

As we have looked at the record of Chinese Communist activity month by month, we have been struck again and again by the campaigns which are initiated and carried forward with great vigor. The language with which these campaigns are conducted is a "lingo" with religious undertones. The slogans, calls to action, reports, and appeals for support remind one inescapably of fund drives, membership campaigns, the fall project and the spring campaign, which are so much a part of churches and service organizations. The fact that the Chinese Communist Party can command allegiance to its campaigns does not alter the fact that the approach appears to call for voluntary devotion and cooperation in the drive of the moment.\*

The article goes on to mention specifically the campaign to "study the works of Mao Tse-tung", just then becoming dominant, saying that it might "remind anyone of efforts to promote study of sacred texts in a religious movement" and, citing an statement of his devotion to this by one faithful scholar, comments: "Change a few words and you have the Sunday School Scholar's pledge! The official attitude toward Mao's works in China today leaves little doubt that they possess undisputed 'canonicity'!"

- though it is also noted that "Reading any Bible can become tedious and tiresome, although the Party would never admit that this could be true of Mao's works".\*\*

To some it may appear shocking seriously to consider the "Thought of Mao" movement in religious terms, but this authority is irreproachable, and a religious viewing of this phase particularly seems helpful, as a psychological approach in terms of "morale" was helpful for the second phase, and a "strategic" approach was for the first. Such an explanatory context or model, for instance, makes many of the discrepant relationships noted above much more comprehensible. In Christianity itself, the leader and his words are largely identified, extensive sermons for today's situation are validated by minimal reference to a fragmentary section of some text written long ago in very different circumstances, and no concern is felt about any discrepancy between Christ's symbolic position and power - also sometimes referred to as "The Light of the World", in fact - and his actual circumstances.

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\* China Notes, 11, No. 4, July 1964, p. 1.

\*\* Loc. cit.

In one sense, then, the "Cult of Mao" idea is a meaningful interpretation, but our understanding may still be obstructed because we tend to interpret this too personally - as just an extreme self-promotion - and this too easily appears to us both repugnant and not credible. This aspect of the movement may look quite different and less extreme to many Chinese in relation, psychologically and politically, to their own historical and socio-cultural contexts. The present claims for Mao, for example, in some respects seem mild compared to similar ones made by and for Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the leader of the Taiping Rebellion a century ago. This unsuccessful scholar called himself "Younger Brother of Jesus" and later the Heavenly King of the Great Peaceful Heavenly Dynasty, before his revolt that seized half of China was finally crushed with foreign military aid.\* This in turn appears as but one example of the Chinese tradition of viewing the Emperor - the "Son of Heaven" - as

not a god but a priest-king - a vicar of heaven charged with the duty of maintaining man and the Middle Kingdom in harmony with the universe....The Chinese....were quite prepared to admit any number of gods into their capacious heaven, but would dogmatically insist that theirs was the only true king, and condemn as heresy any attempt to claim a share of the world for any other on an equal footing. The Christian protested that his alone was the true culture of heaven, the Chinese that his alone was the true culture of earth...all men within it were saved, whether or not they were ethnically of Han origin. All without were benighted. But the Light of the World shone upon them, whether they acknowledged it or - in their abysmal ignorance - did not.\*\*

A similar point about the emperor's position is made by Fairbank, citing an old quotation strongly reminiscent of current eulogies of Mao:

Though the "outer barbarians" were only on the fringe of the Chinese world order, the awe-inspiring example of the emperor made them acknowledge him as the center of civilization. "He nourished them like their father and mother," wrote a Chinese enthusiast in 1859. "He gave them illumination like the sun and moon."\*\*\*

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\* See, among many accounts, Dennis Bloodworth, The Chinese Looking Class. New York: Farrar, Stauss and Giroux, 1966, 1967. Pp. 171-172.

\*\* Bloodworth, op. cit., pp. 343-344.

\*\*\* Fairbank, John K., China: The People's Middle Kingdom and the U. S. A., Cambridge, The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967, p.8.



In fact, the Chinese tradition generally is one in which socio-political ideology is often religious in tone, by our standards, as is witnessed by our persistent tendency to view Confucianism as a religion.

Furthermore, this is not necessarily a system in which the Emperor - or Mao - at the apex is exalted only by demeaning those at the bottom of the social pyramid, although that might appear so to us. Chinese society has always been conceived and operated on the basis of a hierarchically ordered system of social relationships, with the position and security of each individual member - psychologically as well as physically - largely based on his defined place and functioning within this system. Like any system of social order, this one has drawbacks and limitations, but it also provides certain benefits to the individual members. Each derives a certain security from the existence of the system and its definitions of rightness, which ultimately are guaranteed by, and the responsibility of, the ruler; as is well known, his legitimacy - the "Mandate of Heaven" - must be validated by adequate performance. Each, as a part of the whole, potentially shares to some extent in the prestige of the whole and of its head. And the system still allows, in its own characteristic way, some room and channels for individual movement and development. This is perhaps best seen through the example of the general nature of Chinese education. In all kinds of fields, the teacher has high prestige for his student, provides a model for him to copy, and thus inspires confidence. There is already some status involved in being the student of a prestigious teacher, and as student learns to follow and copy the model with increasing skill, his own stature increases further. Eventually, if the learner is good enough, he may even surpass the model and, while remaining within its broad tradition, mark his work with new individuality. All this may apply equally to the humble laborer in a Chinese factory as a workman, or to Mao as a Communist strategist and theoretician - and to both jointly as parts of the Chinese whole. Paradoxically, then, orthodoxy and discipleship may be a foundation for innovation and creativity, as with the promotion of "Mao's thought" in the second phase, and - again a point quite familiar in the Christian instance - the high elevation of the leader may be conceived to strengthen rather than weaken the position of his followers, so that the glorification of Mao is not necessarily just self-aggrandisement, but also that of his followers. It is certain, at the very least, that many Chinese of all sorts of political persuasion, including non-Communists and even anti-Communists, have taken great pride in the new strength of China after long



national weakness and international humiliation.

Again, this viewing is not meant as claiming that all Chinese even on the mainland identify positively with Mao in this way, or that current extreme claims for his position parallel his actual power. Indeed, although the matter apparently has never been studied specifically, it seems that such close parallelism has been the exception rather than the rule even historically in imperial China. Very possibly, the parallelism has rather been between the titles and claims, and conceptions of what the reality really should be - a common Chinese attitude in many areas. Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's claims evidently were premature, in a realistic sense, though they probably served for some time to further his quest for actual power. On the other hand, the claims of many Emperors may often have been "postnatura"; that is, they had begun to lose power to their surrounding ministers and officials while still retaining or increasing their public display of titles and position. Both instances may be relevant for Mao.

It is obvious and admitted that dissent and struggle for power not only exist but are a basic context for the Maoist movement today. It is even possible that the present extremes in the movement's glorification of Mao and his thought - and the associated proliferation of self-righteous and indignant attacks even on many former friendly or neutral countries, who now are denounced as traitors or enemies to Mao's cause and "the people" - reflect desperation rather than strength. Yet both might even be true at once. While the described possible basis for positive Chinese viewing of Mao's elevation to the heights should not be swallowed whole, at least we should use it to avoid leaping to opposite conclusions based mainly on our own attitudes. This tendency is especially dangerous since factual inside information on Chinese political affairs is so lacking to us - and will largely remain lacking; concealment of such information as an internal "family affair" is also a Chinese specialty.

#### The Overall Movement - Development and Directions

From the preceding analysis of the "Thought of Mao" movement in terms of three phases, it does appear that this movement exhibits an overall unity, but certainly not a static unity. Rather, the unity is visible in terms of an overall development, in which progressive change in any given aspect of the movement is closely correlated with related changes in all other aspects, and in the wider environing political context. Moreover, once the general

pattern of this development is clarified, much of it appears as also having significant parallels in traditional Chinese culture.

If we consider, first, the content of the movement, several progressions are evident. Mao's own public expressions of his thought clearly were most numerous and extensive early and have steadily declined to practically zero today. This change is matched, in reverse, by changes in the volume of comment and promotion of "The Thought of Mao" by the movement's supporters and spokesmen - from little in the initial period where Mao "spoke for himself" to a vast flood at present, so that the total volume of statement - Mao plus the commentators - has continually and sharply risen. Meanwhile, taking these two sources together, there have also been significant progressive changes in the dominant focus and the style of the messages. At first the content was mainly concerned with matters of political and military strategy, next with the promotion of more productive techniques - taken broadly, this covers even the application of "The Thought of Mao" to increasing success in such areas as sport, and lastly with the elevation of Mao and his thought as beacons and guarantees of general socio-political rightness. Along with this, the level and style of the messages has also shifted greatly. Mao's own writings were relatively concrete and specific, at least considering the breadth of many of his particular topics, and in comparison to the later messages, and they correspondingly exhibited some variation according to their subject; subsequent pronouncements about Mao's thought in relation to technical improvements generally were more abstract, less specific, and varied little whether the problem referred to was oxygen cylinders or clocks; while the current eulogies are exceedingly abstract, have little specifically stated relation to any particular situation, and are very stereotyped. The amount of new information thus has declined as the total volume of words has multiplied.

Much of the above can be summed up, and the basic pattern clarified further, in the statement: Over thirty-some years, as Mao himself has said progressively less and his proponents progressively more, the messages have altered, in both content and form, from the practical through the psychological to the religious-idealistic, from the definition of strategic aims and principles to morale-building messages to the announcement of dogmas of infallibility. This progression (which is all the more striking because these several aspects of existence and action generally tend to be less

differentiated in Chinese than in Western culture) in essence and broadly has been a steady one - but it has heretofore been obscured by two special features of the Chinese situation: 1) The largely pragmatic nature of the early phase was hidden - perhaps even from Mao himself - by the great scope of the ultimate goals involved and by the extent of verbal reliance on Marxist theory, which lent an appearance of dogma; and 2) the concrete, practical, technical manifest focus of the second phase has served to obstruct perception of its fundamentally psychological basis.

What, then, has been the political context of this movement which now appears as exhibiting a strikingly orderly and internally-consistent development, for Chinese Communism generally, and for Mao Tse-tung specifically? Internally, the Chinese Communists were first a group in opposition, then in unified power nationally, and finally still in power but with evident factional conflict. Meanwhile the external context, though consistently marked by conflict with the capitalist world, first involved ideological dependence but practical isolation from the Soviet Union, followed by both ideological and practical dependence to a degree, then independence, and finally both ideological and practical competition and struggle for world leadership. Mao's own position has first been that of an equal among a group of rebel leaders, and then first among equals in a national government within China, while simultaneously a disciple in relation to the external context of Marxism and the Communist movement led by the Soviet Union. Next Mao became the acknowledged leader of China and Chinese Communism, meanwhile approaching the status of a peer with Soviet leaders. And currently, there is the curious anomaly that the most powerful claims are advanced for Mao's position as the supreme leader of Communism not only for China but for the world, at the very time when his actual power in both appears much in question.

In this search for a positive understanding of the "Thought of Mao" movement, for each of its successive stages it has been helpful to refer progressively more to the broad context of Chinese culture. This may be carried one final step by considering its overall line of development similarly. Such a consideration will also shed some light on two remaining problems which are too important to ignore, although they certainly can not be fully resolved. First, we have, for reasons stated, been emphasizing the positive sense discernable as to the nature of the movement and its potential functioning in relation to the Chinese political context. Now some balancing consideration must be given to an estimate

of the reception of the movement in Communist China and Mao's actual position, although since direct data are largely lacking this must depend mainly on inference. Second, the general implications of the nature and development of the movement for the future must be examined, even though no specific predictions seem possible.

The obvious cultural comparison - already foreshadowed in earlier remarks on Hung Hsiu-ch'uan and the Taipings - is with other Chinese instances of rebellion and attempted seizure of power. There have been many examples of this in Chinese history, including not a few in which the rebel was successful and, like Mao, went all the way from "bandit" to become the ruler of China, and thus also, at least in the Chinese way of thinking about their country, the leader of the civilized world.\* Mao himself has taken note of such rebellions as precursors significantly paralleling the Chinese Communist movement.\*\* At the same time Mao, like Bloodworth, notes that such rebellions even when successful recurrently have only been part of a cyclical process - that after the rebel became the new Emperor the society settled back into its old forms, with the people being ruled from above as before, until the new ruler or dynasty lost its touch with the people, lost power to its ministers and bureaucracy, and eventually was displaced by a new rebellion. Mao naturally makes a strong attempt to claim that this time things will be different, that the Party will rule for the people and the new regime will remain. This, however, did not seem convincing even in his own account; the cyclical emphasis was too strong.\*\*\* By now, the observable picture of the development of Chinese Communism appears still more to correspond with the old cyclic model - perhaps accelerated in correspondence with the prevailing rapid tempo of change in the modern world. Mao has advanced from the equivalent of Emperor of China, but doubts about the continuance of his real power have arisen almost on the heels of his achieving it.

In addition to the historical, there are also important fictional Chinese accounts of rebellion, which help in making clearer the basic

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\* Cf. Bloodworth, op. cit., Ch. 14, 29, 30.

\*\* Mao Tse-tung, The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party (1959). Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1961.

\*\*\* Cf. Wendland, John H., "Family Imagery in a Passage by Mao Tse-tung," World Politics 10, 387-407 (1958), esp. p. 393.

Chinese images or conceptions of this process. The best known of these is the Shui Hu Chuan\*, which also is of special importance because Mao has been specifically reported as strongly impressed by this work\*\*. This typical tale of the formation and growth in power of a band of righteous rebels who have been oppressed by villainous officials also has parallels with Maoism in that the band's chief leader, one Sung Chiang, long minimizes his own position but with increasing success of the group he is gradually elevated to the top rank by his fellows' acclaim.

The development of power and position within the Chinese family may seem a much less obvious area for comparison, yet the family system, a central model for a great deal of Chinese thought and behavior, provides organizational models for both legitimate government and rebellious groups.\*\*\* The parallel of most immediate relevance - one which could profitably be studied at length - concerns the way in which a man (typically an eldest son) progresses through a series of roles in the large extended family which was the Chinese ideal if not the average case. Such an eldest son was first the eldest among brothers, under the authority of the father (or grandfather) though often in some opposition to it. As the father aged and the son matured, the son could become the active head of the family, with the father the nominal head. Later still, on the father's death, the son would succeed fully to his position - only to become in turn, often fairly soon, the nominal head, in a position of maximum respect and deference but little activity and control. This simplified outline does not take into account the probable complexities posed by the roles of the other brothers, of uncles, and of grandfathers, who often were strong patriarchs, but it does give an indication of the many parallels between family "political" careers and the large-scale political careers of successful rebels, both for the changes of actual position and for the common existence of discrepancies between actual power and formal titles, so that in the middle

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\* Available in translation under various titles such as Water Margin, Man of the Marshes, and Pearl H. Sun's All Men Are Brothers (New York, John Day, 1933).

\*\* In Snow, Edgar, Red Star Over China. Rev. ed., New York, Random House, 1944. Cf. also Brookforth, op. cit., pp. 155-158.

\*\*\* Leckland, John H. "Concepts of Cooperative Organization in Chinese Politics", read at American Anthropological Association meeting, Mexico City, December 1950.



stages power is likely to exceed recognition and later recognition is likely to exceed power: .

These political and familial patterns of development have sufficient parallels with the development of the "Thought of Mao" movement to permit drawing several conclusions important for estimates of the present and what is yet to come. In the first place, these parallels emphasize the Chineseness of the movement, regardless of its Communist labeling and terminology - which now is further confirmed by the increasing split with the Soviet Union both in practice and in dogma. Second, the recurrent prominence in the patterns described of the leader's loss of power to his own associates and loss of confidence from the people while still, and perhaps maximally, invested with title and formal position, lend support to Marcuse's judgement that with "a cancerous proliferation of propaganda, in itself a sure sign of disease"\* the Chinese Communists now protest too much Mao's greatness.

Nevertheless, one should be cautious about relying too much on Marcuse's overall characterization of the situation:

Yet there had been at first, I remembered, very much more than hope; there had been confidence. Now, even a systematically hoodwinked observer like myself knew that confidence had gone and that resignation had taken over, the frighteningly deceptive resignation of the Chinese.....When would the new suppression become even more odious than the oppression of old? And how had it happened that the truly noble pride of the early days and the honest faith in a better and happier future had been so shamelessly distorted by a self-seeking prophet no longer speaking for himself, but leaving it to others.....to ascend the soapbox and thump the tub for him? When and how had the prospects of true greatness, so credible fifteen years before, given way to false pretenses?\*\*\*

It seems probable that this disappointed critical view is too extreme. Marcuse fails to recognize that the whole course of developments which he outlines is typical of revolutionary movements in Chinese political history. Thus the present adulation of Mao, in tone, is nothing new for a Chinese ruler. The volume of these claims for Mao is new, but this is hard to evaluate. Is it associated with uncertainty of position and power, or with attempts to make maximal use of these where there are unprecedented aims of

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\* Marcuse, Jacques, The Peking Papers, New York, Dutton, 1967. p. 325.

\*\* Marcuse, op. cit., pp. 324-325.

mobilizing widespread political activity and support among a population historically remote from national affairs - or both?\*

Overall, it does seem probable that now Mao, though incessantly labeled the "Great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander and great helmsman" is in actual function somewhat the "great figurehead", but this position is not new in Chinese politics and not negligible in the situation. This sort of idealized model of the leader may still provide for appreciable numbers of the Chinese people a viable basis for all of the described kinds of positive functioning of the "Thought of Mao" movement - and it has the advantage of possible maintenance even beyond Mao's death, as Marcuse also notes.\*\* This is one reason why we should not rush to take comfort from the above interpretation of Mao's present position, nor expect too much change which we would evaluate as favorable to follow his eventual death.

There is also another and even more basic reason. A great deal of the above discussion documents the basic Chineseness of Mao and his career, even including some main outlines the "Thought of Mao" movement. As Fairbank puts it, "A curious contradiction haunts Chairman Mao's revolution; the more he seeks to make China new, the more he seems to fall back on old Chinese ways of doing it."\*\*\* Therefore, no matter who specifically will replace Mao, we should be prepared for such continuance of similar national behavior rather than counting on expectations of radical change.- The same conclusion follows from noting how constant are the patterns of development and change for Chinese leaders (in this respect even the career of Chiang Kai-shek is remarkably like that of Mao), indicating that the position occupied is at least as important as the individual occupying it and whoever succeeds Mao will necessarily be sitting in much the

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\* "Twentieth-century China had inherited a polity that was highly authoritarian. Modern authoritarianism has been achieved by expanding the old authoritarianism down into the body social-mobilizing, activating, and manipulating a populace that was formerly inert in politics and parochial in its interests. Among so vast a public, this has been a slow process. (Fairbank, op. cit., p. 40)

\*\* Marcuse, op. cit., pp. 295, 297, 315.

\*\*\* Fairbank, op. cit., p. 5.



same seat.\* Marcuse comes close to answering his own agonized question about the changes in Mao and his revolution in these very terms, if only implicitly:

When the Communists came to power in 1949 there was about them a pride and an honesty that has given way to vanity and opportunism. But then what can be more absurd than the Opposition once it has sunk its buttocks in the government saddle and is still calling itself the Opposition?.....In all fairness, on the other hand, one may well ask at what point the revolutionary leader, the man who has made his revolution and has been made by it, can gracefully admit that the revolution has been finished without having to confess that he is finished himself?\*

Putting this matter less personally and more generally within the Chinese cultural context, it appears that like other successful Chinese rebels before him, Mao Tse-tung has, on moving from a position of opposition to that of national leader, been meeting difficulties in finding an adequate and viable pattern of leadership and social organization that would for long preserve the loyalty of his subordinates and the co-operation and support of the people. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that he has even been handicapped in this by sincere attempts not just to become an imperial dictator immediately on access to power - which has been the typical approach to governmental organization in Chinese culture, where large-scale co-operation has always come hard. The progressively snowballing extent and intensity of propaganda of the "Thought of Mao" movement thus most probably represents an extreme effort at control by persuasion - itself, though now on a national scale, basically very similar to earlier use of indoctrination in Confucianism and selfless family-oriented behavior - which has increasingly encountered difficulties and, becoming increasingly more emphatic along the same lines, has become as coercive as the more direct coercion it sought to avoid or minimize.

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\* On the other hand, this does not mean that no change would occur - "Dynastic founders were often great blueprint artists who reorganized Chinese society according to dogmatic plans and visionary doctrines. They were usually followed by consolidators who tidied up the regime and eventually let the people relax" (Fairbank, op. cit., p. 45) - and political changes which do not greatly alter either social structure or long-range national aims may be of considerable immediate importance for foreign relations, as in many coups d'etat.

\*\* Marcuse, op. cit., p. 334.

It has already been suggested that we should not look too hopefully toward major changes at Mao's death. We should likewise be careful about taking comfort from the above analysis, even if it were concluded, maximally, that Mao is desperate and in danger of falling. Desperation, even of one's opponents, is often undesirable; it leads too readily to rash and erratic behavior. Among individuals and social groups generally, minding one's own business when possible, and negotiation and compromise to deal with conflicts of interest or attitude when necessary, occur much more readily between parties that are fundamentally strong and confident than between those that feel weak and fearful. Despite much contention to the contrary - itself often based on hidden fears - there is no valid reason to expect matters to be fundamentally and completely opposite among nations.

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## 13. ABSTRACT

This report analyzes the "Thought of Mao" propaganda movement - its development, present nature, and implications - from a communicational viewpoint.

Our usual reaction has been to dismiss this important movement as irrational without close examination, while other Chinese Communist statements are taken at "face value". This set of alternatives is seen as necessarily misleading as alien to the essential nature of communication, which is outlined as a basis for a set of general principles for better analysis and interpretation of political messages.

The "Thought of Mao" movement is analyzed in terms of three stages. For each Mao's own statements and position are examined in relation to statements about these by the Party, and the prevailing Chinese political context. These successive stages involve a shift from pragmatic to psychological to ideological-religious emphasis, yet this development exhibits a certain unity when viewed with reference to Chinese culture and history. Related considerations suggest that we should be cautious about counting on major changes if Mao is displaced or dies.

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